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## PUTTING TROY IN A SACK

BY FRITZ G. LANHAM

Nothing pleases me more than the constant discovery of the spell the classics exert on people who are not scholars by profession. I have recently read a poem written by a student of the University of Texas, the theme of which is the outline of the Trojan Cycle. This poem begins with the wedding of Peleus and Thetis and ends with the story of the wooden horse and the sack of Troy.

The meter differs for the different scenes and the melody fits the subject in a way to delight the reader.

Two quotations, taken almost at random, will give some idea of the style and the cleverness of the young poet.

When Paris came back with Helen he told a story about the rescue of this maid on a deserted island, and how he had found that she was also closely related to the family of Priam, "She's a cousin of mine."

King Priam just then was a very old head  
Who always thought twice,—often three times instead;  
For his noodle was gray and was known far and wide  
For a whole lot of gray that it harbored inside.  
(It was one you would readily choose in a group  
As a noodle that seldom would get in the soup.)  
And the more he reflected the less he could see  
That Helen was what she purported to be,  
And the more he suspected his son was no saint,  
But a lad with heart trouble or kindred complaint.  
For everywhere Helen would chance to appear  
It was fifty to one that young Paris was near,  
And he seemed to regard it a thing to be proved  
That she as a cousin was not far removed.  
Now Priam observed her both morning and night  
(In a manner, of course, that was proper and right)  
And he came to conclude that the maiden so meek  
By talent and training was totally Greek.  
So the notion of Priam was nipped in the bud  
That she was a daughter of one of his blood,  
For he thought from the things that he heard and he saw  
She was very much more like a daughter-in-law.

The great scene in which Achilles is told of the death of his friend, Patroclus, is thus described by the modern Texas Homer:

When Achilles was told of his follower's fate,  
It is needless to say that his sorrows were great;  
And he wept like a willow  
All over his pillow  
And buried his head like a wild armadillo  
Beneath all the sheets that he had on his bed  
And the blankets and quilts that were over them spread.

He could not have mourned more if his debtors were dead.  
 But his couch lacked the solace he sought for relief,  
 Which was, namely, a comfort to cover his grief.  
     All alone with his woes  
     He could find no repose,  
 While a pain in his heart held him fast in its throes  
 And a counterpane surged from his head to his toes.

If Mr. Lanham happens to read this *Journal* he will know how much he has pleased one reader of his book and he will also read the wish that he may long continue to associate with Homer and the Muses.

JOHN A. SCOTT

NORTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY

### HOMER AND AESCHYLUS

Aristotle, (Poetics 1448b) believed that Homer wrote the Margites as well as the Iliad and Odyssey. He does not ascribe any other poems to Homer, and we know too little of the Margites to decide why he selected it for such august company. However Aristotle belonged to the epoch of erudition and criticism, when literature itself became an object of study and research, instead of a creative art. How much further back does the belief go that Homer wrote other epic poems besides those that we have?

It is often said that it goes back as far as Aeschylus,—that is, almost to 500 B.C., and a passage from Athenaeus is quoted to prove it, (Deipnosophists, viii, 347e). This passage is assumed to contain a citation of Aeschylus to the effect that his tragedies were the leavings of the Homeric banquets. We are to understand that Aeschylus spoke as a reader of the Poetics might have spoken, to the effect that the epic is *πολύμυθος*, and that any one of the plots devised by the fertility of ancient imagination was enough for the modest needs of one of the Epigoni, like himself. And since most of the known plots of Aeschylus do not come from the Iliad or Odyssey, the necessary inference is that he must have thought the whole body of the heroic epic, the so-called Cycle, to be the work of Homer.

The entire passage of Athenaeus is as follows:

"So, too, our friend Ulpian, whom with my fellow-Megalopolitan, Cercidas, we might call the Pot-Fancier, appears to me to eat nothing that becomes a man, but to watch those who are eating to see if they have passed over any spine or any piece of hard meat or gristle from the food set before them; never considering the words of the noble and illustrious Aeschylus, who said that his tragedies were *τεμάχη* of the great Homeric banquets."

If we came to this passage without Aristotle in mind, or other prejudices, should we have thought of translating *τεμάχη* by *reliquiae*, "leavings" or any other word denoting unconsidered fragments of something larger and finer? On the contrary, Ulpian who is satisfied with the crumbs of a feast is expressly contrasted with Aeschylus who was not. The *ὅδ'* makes that clear, if nothing else did. The editor of the *editio princeps* saw this and substituted *ἀεὶ δ'* preferring in his easy Renaissance fashion, an accepted meaning to the reading of the mss. But those who will not follow him in that,